

# The problem whit oliver essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Maggie O'Farrell's novel tells us about the girl Fionnuala who is experiencing the problems and dilemmas associated with becoming an adult. She has a mother who is distraught over how her own youth and is therefore trying to keep her daughter back while Fionnuala is in love with the boy Oliver who wants to take the next step which is keeping their relationship a secret no longer.

We meet Fionnuala on a beach where she waits for Oliver, pretending to at orchestra class. He is late as always, which irritates her because she has to be home soon. She is already stressed by the referring exam and nervous that her mother will find out that she lied about where she is. Fionnuala must be around 15 or 16 years old and attending a high school. From the beginning we see how the rebellious teenager moves with her. When Oliver finally shows up, however, all other thoughts disappear from her head. She is in love.

Oliver does not understand why Fionnuala wants the relationship to be kept secret. It feels wrong for him because he does not know how her mother is. The mother comes from Ireland, and has not put old Irish prejudices, folklore and traditions aside since she moved to England. It appears that she has even named her daughter, Fionnuala, after a mythological princess and refuses to prune the large tree they have standing in front of their house, "Because it's a hawthorn tree and folklore has it that the fairies live in hawthorn trees and that they will wreak a terrible revenge on you if you damage their home." This is of course Irish folklore as well. Fionnuala is ashamed of all these things and tries to deny her Irish heritage.

The hawthorn tree can be seen as a symbol of the barrier between the mother and the country England where she does not seem to fit. “ The tree is a big bone of contention, not only between Fionnuala and her mother, but between her mother and the neighbours, the council, the tourist board – anyone and everyone.” This denial of her surroundings makes the mother seem even more eccentric.

Fionnuala is, as mentioned, ashamed of her mother and will under no circumstances let Oliver meet her. She tries to excuse it with the old prejudice that Irishmen should have against people named Oliver.

Fionnuala lives alone with her mother, who came to England after becoming pregnant too early. This indicates that the mother may not be very old and thus feels more connected to Fionnuala, and she is also the only child she has. The mother is a ceramicist so Fionnuala always think their house smells like clay, which she is tired of. She says that she wants the house to smell of something more normal. Another thing indicating that she is not very proud of her mother.

The mother see herself all the time in her daughter and does not want to be the same for her as it did for her. She would like to have a closer relationship with Fionnuala more like friends, and they have probably had such a relationship when Fionnuala was little. “ Sometimes Fionnuala is so like she was at that age it makes Grainne suspicious that someone somewhere is playing a joke on them, making time loop round twice.”

Fionnuala does not agree with this comparison, at least no more, she is irritated over the mother constantly pointing it out. She does not want to be tied to such a mother anymore. She wants to stand on her own feet and not let her mother get as close as before. She is simply tired of the mother and her Irish roots. It makes her different from her classmates and her mother comes between Fionnuala and Oliver's relationship.

In the part of the story where Fionnuala has to cancel her meeting with Oliver, she has chosen to keep the mother instead of Oliver and this seems almost unthinkable. The mother realizes what is happening with her daughter and understands her. She has, after all, experienced it once. She does not want the same rootless life for her daughter, as she herself has to live with, because her family apparently could not accept her choice. She bridges the gap between Fionnuala and her and realizes she can't hold her little girl anymore because she is already grown up as this sentence indicates: "Bring him back for tea some afternoon. I'd like to meet him. I might even make a cake." The main theme of the story is the classic theme about being young and growing up. We gain insight in Fionnuala's dilemmas around freeing herself from her mother and embark on shaky ground with love as a benchmark. What happened to the mother could also have happened to Fionnuala, but because the mother acts on her own experiences she is able to help her daughter stay out of the trouble that she ended up in. She chooses to support her daughter in this precarious situation, and to help her well into her adult life.